

12 G m

CHARGE

GIVEN AT

THE VISITATION, &c.

EDWARD



MOLLY

A

694. h 11
8

CHARGE

GIVEN AT

THE VISITATION

OF

THE ARCHDEACONRY OF SALOP,

IN

THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD,

IN THE YEAR 1794.

By JOSEPH PLYMLEY, M. A. Archdeacon.

SHREWSBURY:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. AND W. EDDOWES.

SOLD ALSO BY MESSRS. LONGMAN, RIVINGTON, AND CADELL,
LONDON; FLETCHER, OXFORD; AND MERRILL, CAMBRIDGE.

1794.

CHARGE

GIVEN AT

THE VISITATION

OF

THE ARCHDEACONRY OF SALOP



THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD

IN THE YEAR 1796

BY JOSEPH RAYMOND, M. A. ARCHDEACON

STATIONER:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. AND W. BROWN

SOLD ALSO BY MESSRS. LONGMAN, RIVINGTON, AND CADDIS,
LONDON; FLETCHER, GOSNOLD; AND MERRILL, CAMBRIDGE.

1796

CHARGE, &c.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

YOU will pardon me, I hope, if in what I am about to lay before you, I go out of the circle of this Arch-deaconry, and propose, for our consideration, some of those leading features in the public disposition, that are formed from the circumstances of the times.—Let it not, however, for a moment be supposed, that I have the folly or the presumption to enter into the warfare of politics. Odious as a spirit of party is at all times, and in all persons, how particularly does it contaminate the clerical character? or, allowing to the upright statesman the full dignity of his merit; or, without detracting from the temper of real patriotism and its important duties in

B

the

the several ranks and conditions of life; still, if we consider these days as anniversaries for joint deliberation how we may in the best manner further the ends of our imperious mission; how those principles may be best taught and disseminated, from which the full discharge of social duty can alone emanate;—How inferior are the contentions, even of kingdoms, to the purposes for which we are assembled!

Minute as many of the enquiries are that we have to enter into upon these occasions; small as are the objects from which we have most frequently to make our report, yet this does not impeach the high assumption—They are the means to an end, confessedly the highest; and whether we consider only the bare call of names, for the sake of remaining still certain that each flock has its appointed shepherd, or any one of the outward circumstances essential to the maintenance or propagation of the christian religion: or have to observe upon the state of this or that people, or the condition of mankind in general, as affording, from the events of life, an opportunity of exercising new duties, or enforcing the more zealous application of old ones:—Still, nothing is too little for our regard, nor any thing too arduous for our endeavours, that has decidedly for its object the welfare of the human race, and that comes within the nature of those appointments, by which we have engaged to serve them.

Pleasant

Pleasant as the language of panegyric is, be the subject on which we can allowably employ it ever so trivial; and particularly gratifying as it is to report the progress of virtue, I know not that my present task is of this nature. Neither is it necessary that I should appear here, as the unwilling organ of censure, either public or private. Waving for the present any further details of what I consider the more immediate objects of my care, (and about which I cease not still to occupy myself,) I have to entreat you to join me in considering *whether there are not circumstances in the Times leading to religious impressions? and whether what may be called the exigencies of the Times, can be answered, but by the extension of such impressions, and rendering the stamp of them indelible?*

Without entering minutely into the history of those convulsions that order has so widely sustained; a history, perhaps but partially known to the best informed, and with which, in the discharge of our daily duties, we can have had no peculiar opportunities of becoming acquainted; without attempting to trace the many secret workings, whereby the intentions of the good have been made subservient to the temporary purposes of the wicked; or, without spreading the canvass for a portraiture of suffering humanity, extensive beyond parallel in the annals of modern Europe—without enquiring how far Despotism

potism was the secret progenitor of Anarchy, or how far impatience of controll compleated the mischief: both from their beginning working certainly, tho' silently, the proper course of wrong; heaping up the measure of their own iniquity, till the appointed upshot of sin became the punishment of the offence: or, without deliberating in what degree superstition has been prejudicial to the Church burthened with her Errors; or how far hypocrisy, by building worldly views on the innocent bigotry of the many, has counteracted that weakness at the expence of her own cunning, and, by the assumption of counterfeit faculties, destroyed in the instance powers that were legitimate: without pointing out how truth has pursued her wonted triumph, by exhibiting in these particulars the misery of those who would betray her; or presupposing the means by which the Almighty will atchieve her future conquests; for whether we are allured to her standard by the peaceful fruits of righteousness; or scared thither by horror at those who walk not in her laws; the same lesson of Providence is holden forth to mankind: and if the latter case is the one now present to us; if, amidst the contests of passion, producing ambiguity in report and scepticism of what is reported; ONE general fact stands clear and indisputable, and the tenor of events unite in declaring, that philosophy, unsupported by divine truth, has effected and does still threaten to effect, evil to mankind; and that from hence
those

those who fought not God's altars in the hey-day of their prosperity, that those who were become indifferent to religion or discountenanced its ritual; that those, who were too short-sighted to see the necessity of faith in the prospect of futurity, are willing to shelter under her banners, from the apprehension of worldly harm. If then there is this in the temper of the times, and that in a degree proportioned to the alarm it has extended within these realms; if the negligent and the scornful are driven to the church; if the superstitious attend with increased respect, and the selfish and the worldling approach her with awe; let it be seen that decency and order reign at least there; or, if complacency at the public voice, fostering with a fonder tone the name of religion, has caused me to attribute too wide a conversion; yet, if the matters in agitation around us are but calculated to point the word of truth, it is argument and encouragement to us to preach it if possible with a purer energy.

This is no fictitious advantage offered to our acceptance. Placing, as we ought, and as I hope we do place, our whole mind on the discharge of our duty; measuring our felicity by the prevalence of piety in the persons committed to our charge; estimating our happiness by the reciprocity of christian principles with those whose welfare we have engaged to consult; viewing their moral improvement as

the genuine fruit of those principles, and anticipating therefrom their comfort thro' life, and their joy in death, how gladly must we seize any opportunity of extending these satisfactions, of collecting additional motives of zeal in ourselves, from the present dispensations of Providence, as well as from our general knowledge of the part allotted us?

Many, even of our own congregations, may come within the descriptions I have given; or, did it belong more particularly to those who are said to live in the world, still its influence would reach us from the descent of example; and the numbers of a country audience may be increased from the enlarged congregations of its general or particular metropolis. And whether those affording the benefit of such an example, are converts of conscience from seeing the want of success in systems that are irreligious, or only wish to uphold the sanctions of the church as an engine of state energy; the one case is favourable to, and the latter is not adverse from, the improvement of mind and principle in the individual. And perhaps, no human suffrage can be more conclusive in favour of religion, than what is thus holden forth. It gives the real solution of what has been descanted upon as a discovery in Christianity, viz: That its blessed author sought not to make any political directions for mankind, but to leave the governments of the world just as he found them. But how unnecessary are such distinctions?

distinctions? for what makes the political complexion of any people, but the religious impression they bear? and how little would it signify what was the form of any Government, if the members of it were all christians in deed, as well as in word? Could there be then any oppression in rule? Could there be then any hesitation in obedience? And what is Government, but as a means to an end? and does not Christianity inform us of what the end is, and what the means ought to be? How easily would the worst parts of a bad Government be set right, where the members of it sought to act only according to the precepts of the Gospel? and how unequal are the constitutions of the best to the service of absolute good, if a large part of those constituting them, act from false principles, from a desire of individual gain or individual honour, or even wishing only to further the general good, if the plan is dictated under the impression of party spirit, if from the bias of education, or the irritations of opposition; if, in fact, we reason from any data short of truth itself, we may, both in the means and the end, go wide of our principal design.

Nor does this exclude the guide of experience; which acts as a reflector to truth upon the human mind; and when once Revelation has given us the supremacy of principle, experience will give us superiority in its application. The misfortune is, people in general look at precedent,

precedent, and call it experience; but what does not real experience teach us with regard to the effect of Christianity upon Government, when we compare the difference between that of the best country unenlightened by its splendor, and the worst of those where this splendor is at all visible: and will there not be found about an even chain of connection, an equal graduation in merit and improvement of every kind, in proportion as the light of Christianity is obscured, and in proportion as it is divested of the accidents obscuring it? The connection between the cause and the effect, may not be to every one the most obvious; but as the fact is so, it is a fact that cannot be too often repeated; and the more obscure the action of the cause is, if it acts essentially and surely to the happiness of mankind, thro' difficulties and obstructions of various sorts; this does but the more prove its intrinsic worth and omnipotence.

If, then, Government has been perverted, more especially among infidel nations, to the aggrandisement of the governors and the depression of the governed; and if, in what are called christian countries, the happiness of the whole has kept pace with the purity of its church and the efficiency of its religious establishments; and if, in our own particular, we have the satisfaction of being able to say, that since the period of the Revolution, when our religion became fixed more unequivocally upon

upon reformed principles, the degree of liberty and prosperity enjoyed by the whole has been greater than this nation before knew, or than any other nation has yet experienced; what is wanted, but the effectual propagation of true belief, to correct the evils any country may labour under?

The necessary step, then, to political reformation, wherever it may be wanting, is the perfecting of religious principles among those who form the body politic: then each party, acting upon their first basis, justice, would generally meet at the same spot, or the obliquities of the understanding, where there were none in the heart, would be easily set right. And whether the progress of truth is to be commensurate with such a purpose, in time; or whether the extensions of its seminal principle will only bear full fruit in eternity; the attempted approximation of it, is the only certain means of general and individual welfare.

This, then, is the point to which our endeavours should be directed. We belong to an establishment, the general outline of which marks out for our attempts this one essential reform; and we may fairly ask, What institution affords so likely a prospect of effecting it, as that which divides a country into districts, for the purpose of placing in each some one who has learned to teach those who have not.

D

And

And tho' there are inequalities in the size of parishes, and inferiority in the appropriation of income, with other irregularities; (not detracting from the wisdom of the design, but shewing more clearly, from these exceptions, the excellency of the rule itself) and all which may be easily remedied, and than which nothing will conciliate their remedy so soon, as a faithful discharge of the ability we have; let us consider only, in addition to the effect it should seem, comparatively speaking, it has already had, how many in this country may be daily made better by our further application of that ability; and whether any time can be more friendly to its full exertion than the present. The important NOW is indeed always the time for individual reform at least; and beginning at that right end, let us exemplify the best union between Church and State, an alliance not merely capable of palliating evil, but of eradicating it together with its cause, and to which we may safely say, without the imputation of fondness or bigotry, *esto perpetua.*

In applying this, then, our general duty, to the inferior purposes of the world that now is, let us see how exactly its several provisions meet any evils that may be apprehended without involving us in the business of politics, or taking us at all out of the character of quiet and inoffensive clergymen; indeed it is only in that character we can render our full and proper services.

To

To say, that knowledge without virtue is dangerous, would not be correct, because perfect knowledge would be virtue: but there may be many and great degrees of knowledge without it: and in proportion as bodies of men have insight into the extent of their own strength, without being previously acquainted with the restraints that conscience imposes on that strength, they have a knowledge highly dangerous to society: and if the multitude in a neighbouring country have most fully and unhappily illustrated this remark; and if ill-designing or ill-judging persons in this have sought purposely to spread the fatal intelligence; and if its publicity has been aided involuntarily by others, by the outcry that incorrect zeal and terror have raised against it: it is argument to us to take especial care that political information in the multitude does not outgo their knowledge of religious restraints. Property is indeed a more extensive security for good behaviour in this country, than perhaps in others, and perhaps than many in this are aware of, its divisions being multiplied beyond what is usually apprehended: but it is by no means a pledge of sufficient import, an hostage of inalienable peace, which can only have a precarious existence from a degree of ignorance in the bulk of mankind, or be provided for with certainty by their moral attainments. In all attempts, then, to serve the cause of order, and point the hearts and minds of men to a regard for continued and good government, it
must

must be done upon its true and genuine principle, as the natural effect of that religion, which, whilst it teaches magistrates to rule as the ministers of God, for good, procures to them the truest allegiance, in that it teaches subjects also to obey, not only for wrath, not for fear only of human punishment, but as matter of conscience and a branch of religious duty; and however plausible any other attachments may appear, they will not be superior to the events of time, they will fail in cases of real necessity and importance. For mere terror at the wickedness of the prophane, is not virtue in the person fearing; and hatred against them for their crimes, is assimilating ourselves to their character, by superinducing in us what is criminal also. — A sense of indignation and horror at great enormities, is indeed, in its first impulse, an effort of virtue; but every thing that enjenders passion, weakens principle; every thing that raises alarm, brings on a sentiment too powerful for ordinary integrity to withstand. Whatever agitates the public mind, let it come from what quarter, or in what shape it will, tends to dissolve the bonds of society; and an uninformed people, called forth in support of the best purposes, will soon gain a clearer conception of the opportunity offered them of obtaining, what they would ignorantly suppose, advantages to themselves, however transitory or hurtful the gratification may really be.—Or if zeal for what is thought a good cause will not brook the smallest controul;
and

and from hearing the means to an end disapproved of, immediately conclude there is difference also as to the end; will it not often lead to accusations, producing retorts, and giving rise at least to personal enmity, and probably to real difference of opinion in the end; when calmness and moderation might have confirmed friendship and promoted truth?

Again: any position beyond the truth; any attribute of merit to an object really good, but beyond the degree of its merit, creates rather a partiality against it in a mind not strictly taught, from the natural repugnance there is to error when it does not originate with ourselves. Hence it is necessary that arguments are true, as well as that there is verity in the opinion itself. The lover of truth will equally wish to destroy a false argument, whether it is advanced in favour of a good cause or a bad one: hence again there may arise misunderstanding when there is little difference; for, what unnecessary dislikes does contest produce? and how much less is the real difference of sentiment among mankind than is generally imagined? from the want of corresponding accuracy between terms and ideas; from the adoption of popular names, to which each person affixes his own, and it may be a different meaning; from the indolence of some in not defining what they would express, and from the activity of others in supposing beforehand what it must

E

be

be. But should there be real difference, on how many occasions may it happen to frail human beings, without any impeachment of honesty to either, each having made up their mind conscientiously, and according to their best knowledge and belief. But from the progress of hasty misconception, reason must become truly serious, and piety would almost despair, did we not trust that the wisdom which is from above, and which is gentle, would in time unravel that complicated feeling, from whence moral improvements have been combated upon moral ground, when an indiscreet or pretended zeal for reform has furnished worldly wisdom with weapons against it; and worldly fear with terror at the name. The unhappy prostitution of it has undermined its native energy, and formed a concurrence of causes, all acting apparently to the protraction, tho' I trust in the end, to the firmer execution of that work the common Father of all nations sent us hither to do, that of training the soul to a sense of the regularity of heaven, from having been lessened in setting right the irregularities of the earth,

But if, after having sought to make the most of this preventative to evil, and standing, as we do in the eye of reason and probability, further removed from present calamity, and from the apprehension of calamity, than other nations, vice and folly should be permitted, for
 wise

wise though inscrutable purposes, to counteract our ground-work of peace, and that constitution so rich in human wisdom, with component parts so nicely framed, that provision is already made for the regular introduction of every improvement that increased virtue or knowledge may become capable of devising, and which wants only the fuller establishment of both, for the greater display of the advantages it already possesses, by giving more promptitude to the execution of laws that are salutary; should the integrity of this approved fabric be invaded, and the glorious pre-eminence of standing the warders off of mischief, unconnected indeed with any party, but serving in the most effectual way the interests of the well-meaning in all, be denied to the preachers of the gospel of peace,—There is a spirit of humanity in which that gospel enjoins us still to act, and of which our own liturgy continually reminds us—Acknowledging in its very beginning our own sins, that we have done those things we ought not, and left undone what we should have performed, and praying in the words of our divine master, for forgiveness on the express terms of exercising the same virtue in our own bosoms; how much is presumption of opinion in our own favour discouraged, and bitterness of opinion against our enemies prohibited? We pray in our Litany that “God would have mercy upon all men;” and afterwards branch out this general petition in favour of “our enemies, persecutors,

persecutors, and slanderers." We pray in one of our occasional collects for " grace, to love and bless our persecutors, according to the example of the proto-martyr;" and acknowledge, in another, that all our doings without charity, " the very bond of peace," are useless. We pray continually on the days preceding the commemoration of our LORD's death, that we may follow the example of his patience; and, upon the day we commemorate it, " That God would have mercy upon all jews, turks, infidels and heretics, and make them one fold under one shepherd."

If, then, it were not known how often human passions have sullied religious or patriotic zeal, and the fairest cause become mischievous in its progress and nugatory towards its end, from want of those requisitions in christianity, these criterions of our church being duly attended to; it would be deemed impossible that the members of it should ever take part in the bitterness of wrath, or help on to greater warmth the passions of the ignorant and misinformed. If we must blow the trumpet in Zion, or sound an alarm in the holy mountain, let it be to rouse the judgments, not the feelings, of mankind; and though we should entertain a reasonable degree of caution, whilst the judgments of the Almighty are more particularly alive in the earth; yet the inference that religion draws, and
that

that reason and obligation more especially impose on our body ; the inference, in short, with which we have to do, is, " That the world from thence should learn righteousness."

I must again, my reverend brethren, bespeak your pardon for the trouble I have given you, and your favourable acceptance of the discourse I have presumed to offer; and I entreat you to believe that in doing it, my sole motive has been to throw out to your better judgment some of those facts and their application, that I thought most apposite to the temper, or the distemper, of the times; such as, under the conduct of your zeal and discretion, may become conducive to the credit of our church, the prosperity of our state, and, what is of still greater consequence, the final happiness of mankind. It is said to be a christian duty to exhort one another; as such, I have with less reluctance used the privilege given me by my office, thinking that at this moment we cannot be too strongly impressed with the duties that are upon us; or with the kind of spirit in which our religion teaches us to fulfil them.

Lately published by the same Author,

**A
SERMON**

PREACHED AT

The Triennial Visitation of the Lord Bishop of Hereford,

Holden at Church Stretton, in the County of Salop,

ON THURSDAY, THE 5th OF JULY, 1792.

Preached and published by Command of his Lordship.

ALSO,

A CHARGE

GIVEN AT

The Primary Visitation of the Archdeaconry of Salop,

IN

THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD,

IN THE YEAR 1793.

